

Remarks by Ambassador Beatrice W. Welters

Premiere of

“The Merikins”

Wednesday, March 21, 2012

at Digicel Imax Theater, Port of Spain

(AS PREPARED)

Salutations:

- Dr. the Honorable Surujrattan Rambachan Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Other Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament
- My Colleagues of the Diplomatic Corps.
- Members of the Media,
- Members of the Merikin Community
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen ...

Good evening:

I am **very happy** to be here today for the premiere of **The Merikins**, the **first documentary** to tell the story of this **nearly-forgotten** community of freedom fighters.

I first heard about the Merikins from my friend **Tina Dunkley** who you will see in tonight's film.

Tina, like many here tonight is descended from those **freed slaves** who arrived in Trinidad **almost 200 years ago**.

Growing up in Trinidad she knew **almost nothing** about her family's history until as an adult she began to research it.

Through her research she learned about the Merikin's struggle for **freedom** and to find a new home.

Digging into the historical record she even found a **letter** from slave owners describing her ancestor's **escape**.

This story **touched** me deeply and I decided that part of my mission in Trinidad and Tobago would be to **make sure** the story of the Merikins was told.

The United States is a nation **founded** on the principle that we are all created **equal** and that our freedom is an **inalienable** right.

But the government of the United States has **not** always lived up to that ideal.

The struggle of the Merikins shows that desire for **freedom** is found in the **hearts** of **every** man, woman and child.

And that **people**, if given a chance, will make **any sacrifice** to gain their freedom.

Although the Merikins were slaves in the United States they brought their **culture**, their **music** and their **religion** with them to Trinidad.

And, as you can see from the name, they were **proud** to be from America.

I am very **happy** that tonight we have a chance to open these **lost pages** of Trinidad and America's **shared history** and **remember** the courage of these forgotten freedom fighters through this documentary.

Thank you.